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Leza L Olson 11/02/2006 02:09:55 PM From DB/Inbox: Leza L Olson

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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 2380
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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 4914
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. Mideast

12. Iran

13. Lebanon

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that the diplomatic-security cabinet decided on Wednesday to continue military pressure on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, but not to expand the operation. However, it has instructed the IDF to prepare for a larger operation if such an operation becomes necessary. The cabinet meeting was held after a day of heavy fighting in the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanun, in which one IDF soldier and eight Palestinians, most of them militants, were killed. Israel radio, cites Palestinian sources that four Palestinians were killed Thursday, among them, a fifteen-year-old boy and an elderly man. Israel Radio reported that three Qassam rockets were launched towards the southern town of Sderot. No casualties reported.

Ha'aretz reported that in the security cabinet meeting, other decisions were made, among them resolutions "aimed at satisfying American requests in advance of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's visit to Washington." According to the paper, the government has given its approval to General Keith Dayton's plan to arm and train PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas's forces.

Leading media quoted Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya as saying, regarding IDF's operation in Gaza: "This massacre is the first fruit of the inclusion of the extremist Lieberman in the Zionist occupation government. His inclusion in the government will cause an increase in Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people."

Ha'aretz quotes senior officials as saying that Israel is ignoring US preparations to withdraw from Iraq, despite the fact that such a move would have a significant impact on Israel.

Leading media cited White House spokesman Tony Snow as saying that the administration is concerned from testimonies indicating that Syria, Iran and Hezbollah are trying to topple the Lebanese government. Israel Radio reported that the Syrian embassy to the US rejected the accusations and called them "ridiculous."

Israel Radio reported that after two days of negotiations in Cairo. Hamas leaders from Damascus who came to discuss a prisoner exchange deal have risen their demands. According to the radio they are demanding the release of 500 prisoners prior to Corporal Gilad Shalit's release and the release of 1000 more prisoners afterwards. Hamas is demanding that Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti will be freed among the Palestinians to be released.

Israel Radio cited an official Egyptian source as warning Israel that if it attacks the weapon smuggling tunnels in the Philadelphia Route from the air, relations between Israel and Egypt will be affected.

Maariv reported that US President George Bush hinted to French President Jacques Chirac in their meeting five weeks ago that he will understand Israel if it attacks Iran.

Ha'aretz cited Hamas officials as saying that an initial agreement was reached on a Palestinian unity government. According to Palestinian sources the sides were discussing the possibility of

appointing a prime minister that is identified with Hamas but not a member of the organization.

Ha'aretz reported that British Prime Minister Tony Blair is expected to travel to the Middle East before the end of the year. According to the paper, Blair has started to hold a dialogue with Syria in order to convince it to play a "positive" role in the region.

Maariv publishes a list of 19 right-wingers who made it into the GSS list of people who were told by OC Central Command Maj. Gen. Yair Naveh to stay out of all of Judea and Samaria. A top security source was quoted: "Each of them has the means and the intent to perpetrate secret and violent activity against Arabs or their property. The

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orders were issued based on concrete intelligence information."

Leading media reported on the results of the Social Strength Index, measured before next week's Sderot Conference for Society. According to the survey there is a serious deterioration in public faith in the state and its institutions, including the Israel Defense Forces.

For example Ha'aretz publishes that: "In 2003, 27 percent of the public said they do not trust public institutions to help them in a time of need. That rate nearly doubled this year to 51 percent." Leading media reported that Defense Minister Amir Peretz is holding up his approval on IDF's round of appointments. The media reports that there is growing tension between the Minister and IDF officials especially Chief of Staff Dan Halutz.

All media noted that today, Thursday, is the eleven-year anniversary of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The Jerusalem Post cited US Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones as saying at a lecture given at the Transit-Global Energy and Political Trends conference at the University of Haifa that the US goal is to help secure a supply of gas and oil to the ME and Asia and that is why the US is encouraging multiple pipelines.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "In the Israeli political and military view: the road to a second Lebanon in Gaza goes through Hamas's ideas for a hudna. Thus, there is no chance of a diplomatic arrangement of any kind with Hamas. And so we find ourselves in a gradual process leading to a large-scale military confrontation in Gaza."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The cabinet, in its new, more militant composition following the entry of Avigdor Lieberman, has been asked to approve an expanded IDF operation in Gaza when in practice, the operation is already underway, or has at least begun. In this case as well, it is hard to rely on the leadership's judgments."

Block Quotes:

II. "The Finger Plugging the Dike"

Senior military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/2): "Operation Autumn Clouds is a pinpoint operation, with limited goals, for a set time. But it is one more step in the direction of focusing the military efforts in the Gaza Strip.... These are gradual, slow, calculated actions, with a minimum of damage to the civilian population, in the course of which the army will try to strike as many armed men as possible, to arrest as many people as possible for interrogation, to try and locate as many labs as possible or as many hiding places for weapons. This action will not completely stop the Kassam rocket fire. On the other hand, it will also not lead to a big explosion with Hamas. Hamas at the moment does not want an escalation. At the moment, the level of resistance on the ground

against this action is not high. But that could change.... In the Israeli political and military view: the road to a second Lebanon in Gaza goes through Hamas's ideas for a hudna. Thus, there is no chance of a diplomatic arrangement of any kind with Hamas. And so we find ourselves in a gradual process leading to a large-scale military confrontation in Gaza."

II. "What Motivates the IDF"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (11/2): "The legitimate differences of opinion between the government and the army over the necessity of a large-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip have become part of an illegitimate battle for survival by those who conducted the second Lebanon war. In a situation where the chief of staff is fighting for his position, a state commission of inquiry is not yet out of the question and the Winograd Committee is at the height of its investigation, it is hard to distinguish manipulations from serious debate, or necessary moves from public relations.... The cabinet, in its new, more militant composition following the entry of Avigdor Lieberman, has been asked to approve an expanded IDF operation in Gaza when in practice, the operation is already underway, or has at least begun. In this case as well, it is hard to rely on the leadership's judgments. Are there indeed essential security reasons for reoccupying the Philadelphi Route, or are commanders whose pride was hurt looking for a success, or at least a diversion, or to silence the critics by mobilizing a national consensus for a new operation? "

----- ¶2. Iran: -----

Summary: -----

Columnist Amir Taheri wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The Assad regime is the typical Arab set-up that cannot survive without the backing of an outside power. For a brief moment in 2003 and 2004 it looked as if the US could provide that backing. Since then, Assad has been left with no option but putting himself under Iranian protection. And that, in turn, makes a showdown between the US and the Islamic Republic that much more possible."

Block Quotes: -----

"The 'Iranization' of Syria"

Columnist Amir Taheri wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (11/2): "While there is much talk of continued Syrian machinations in Lebanon, little attention is paid to an Iranian plan to remodel Syria into a Khomeinist state.... Last summer's war in Lebanon that ended with Israel's 'greatest defeat,' according to Iran, has strengthened the supporters of a Damascus-Teheran axis within the Syrian leadership. The Assad regime is the typical Arab set-up that cannot survive without the backing of an outside power. For a brief moment in 2003 and 2004 it looked as if the US could provide that backing. Since then, Assad has been left with no option but putting himself under Iranian protection. And that, in turn, makes a showdown between the US and the Islamic Republic that much more possible."

----- ¶3. Lebanon: -----

Summary: -----

Arab affairs correspondent Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Nasrallah's calculation is that if the government falls, he will win more seats in the next election -- and if he does not win a majority, he can always continue to threaten the government from outside.... In the coming days, attempts to reach a compromise will continue. For now, however, it seems as if the government is en route to collapsing."

Block Quotes:

"Siniora's Government on the Road to Collapse"

Arab affairs correspondent Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/2): "Even without the warnings emanating from the White House, it is clear that Lebanon is embroiled in a severe political crisis. Since the end of the war in Lebanon, and especially over the last two weeks, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has been honing his demands of Fouad Siniora's government.... Nasrallah is demanding the establishment of a national unity government in which the Shi'a parties -- Amal and Hezbollah -- would have greater representation. Currently, they comprise only five of the 24 ministers; Nasrallah wants to increase this to one-third.... This would effectively give the Shi'as a veto over important decisions, since under Lebanon's constitution, such decisions must be approved by two-thirds of the cabinet. Siniora opposes a unity government, as this would probably restore Syria's influence over Lebanese politics, constrain Lebanon's economic and foreign policy.... Nasrallah's calculation is that if the government falls, he will win more seats in the next election -- and if he does not win a majority, he can always continue to threaten the government from outside. Siniora, for his part, has few options: A unity government would neutralize his political power, but he has no guarantee of winning new elections. In the coming days, attempts to reach a compromise will continue. For now, however, it seems as if the government is en route to collapsing."

JONES